

Poletown Historic District
Bull Dog Electric Products Company Plant
(Aluminum Castings Company)
(Aluminum Manufacturers, Inc.)
(Mutual Electric and Machine Company)
7500 Joseph Campau Avenue
Detroit
Wayne County
Michigan

HABS No. MI-275-2

HABS
MICH,
82-DETRO,
28-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL ARCHITECTURAL AND ENGINEERING RECORD
POLETOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT
Bull Dog Electric Products Company Plant

HABS
MICH,
82-DETRO,
28-

HABS No. MI-275-2

(Also known as Aluminum Castings Company, Aluminum Manufacturers, Inc., Mutual Electric and Machine Company, and the Department of Public Lighting)

Location:	7610 Joseph Campau Avenue, North of Dunn Road, Detroit and Hamtramck, Michigan
	UTM: 17.331495.4694000 Quad: Highland Park
Date of Construction:	1909-1945
Present Owner:	City of Detroit, Department of Community & Economic Development 150 Michigan Avenue Detroit, Michigan 48226
Present Use:	None
Significance:	It served as one of the earliest aluminum casting plants in Detroit and as a major manufacturing center for electrical switching equipment.
Historian:	Charles K. Hyde, April 1981

Bull Dog Electric Products Company occupied this manufacturing complex from 1927 until 1971, and most local residents have no memory of the plant before Bull Dog Electric. These buildings, however, initially developed as an aluminum foundry. The Detroit City Directory for 1910 showed the Aluminum Castings Company, "Aluminum, Brass and Bronze Founders," at the site (incorrectly identified as Chene Street), the first clear reference to activity there.¹ The Aluminum Castings Company, incorporated on August 13, 1909, became part of Aluminum Manufacturers, Inc. of Cleveland in November 1919. In the late 1910s, about 2,000 men worked at this plant.² Mutual Electric and Machine Company bought the property in 1924, initiating a new period of plant utilization. Mutual Electric became Bull Dog Electric Products Company in 1927 and remained at this site for more than four decades. In the 1928 City Directory, the firm identified itself as "Manufacturers of Switchboards, Knife Switches, Safety Switches, Cabinets, and Panel Boards."³ The City of Detroit's Department of Public Lighting bought the plant in 1971 and used it as a warehouse and service facility until it was razed in 1981.

A burst of construction in 1909-1911 established the broad outlines of the complex. The major structure was the steel-framed foundry building, which measured 296 feet by 300 feet overall, but consisted of five interconnected parallel foundries, each 60 feet wide and 150 feet long, running perpendicular to a passageway 38 feet wide and located at the southern end of the building. Each foundry had its own core room (30 feet by 87 feet) at the northern end of the building, separated from the foundry area by a central passageway which ran perpendicular to the core rooms and foundries. This passageway was 21 feet wide and 300 feet long, with brick walls. Each foundry-core room was surmounted by a gabled roof with a clerestory monitor running the entire length of the building.

Two steel-framed buildings with brick walls were attached to the southern

end of the foundry building -- the powerhouse (1909-1910), 48 feet by 79 feet, and a building used for trimming, grinding, and inspecting (1911), measuring 121 feet square. Both survived until 1981. A machine shop, also at the southern fringe of the property, did not fare so well. It was a steel-framed rectangular building with sawtooth roof monitors, and originally measured 106 feet wide and 354 feet long. Almost the entire building except for the westernmost 30 feet was demolished to provide parking sometime in the late 1940s. Finally, a pair of two-story rectangular brick buildings located west of the foundry and fronting on Joseph Campau have survived from this initial wave of construction -- an office building (1909) measuring 50 feet by 80 feet, located at the northwest corner of the foundry, and a pattern storage and machine shop (1912), measuring 50 feet by 100 feet, situated at the southwest corner of the foundry.⁴ Later, a two-story brick building 50 feet wide and 91 feet long connected these two buildings.

The last major structure was a three-story reinforced concrete building measuring 110 feet by 125 feet, constructed in the early 1940s. It had an internal framing system utilizing flat slabs and massive mushroom columns. At the time Bull Dog Electric vacated the property, it used the first floor for loading docks and warehouse space, the second floor for general offices, and the third floor for storage.⁵ On the eve of demolition in 1981, the complex included a 50,000 gallon steel water tower (ca. 1910) and a substantial brick smokestack of unknown vintage.

NOTES

¹Polk's Detroit City Directory, 1910 (Detroit, 1910). The original street address was 1614 Joseph Campau. After Detroit streets were renumbered, 7610 Joseph Campau was used from 1921 until 1971, when the Public Lighting Department settled on 7500 Joseph Campau.

²Clarence M. Burton, The City of Detroit, Michigan, 1701-1922, I (Detroit, 1922), p. 598.

³Polk's Detroit City Directory, 1928-29 (Detroit, 1929).

⁴Drawing, "Location Plan For the Aluminum Castings Company," September 1, 1915, with revisions of November 15, 1917 and November 14, 1923.

⁵Prospectus for the property, prepared by Carl Rosman & Company, Realtors, March 1971.